



Critical Response I. Paratext and Genre System: A Response to Franco Moretti

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Critical Response

I

Paratext and Genre System: A Response to Franco Moretti

Katie Trumpener

In the 1970s, as a teenage browser in West Germany's remarkably well-stocked bookstores, I noted with astonishment that many German title pages included generic designations. German plays old and new tended to announce their dramatic status in idiosyncratic subtitles that seemed to push at the limits of the genre, even question the possibility of theater itself: Friedrich Schiller, *Don Carlos. Infant of Spain. A Dramatic Poem* (1783–87); Ödön von Horváth, *Faith, Love, Hope: A Little Dance of Death in Five Acts* (1932); Wolfgang Borchert, *Outside the Door: A Play No Theater Wants to Perform and No Public Wants to See* (1947); Peter Weiss, *The Investigation. An Oratorio in Five Songs* (1965). Works in hybrid, documentary genres often had equally idiosyncratic subtitles; East German poet Sarah Kirsch named her 1975 oral history *The Panther Woman. Five Unkempt Tales from the Tape Recorder*.

More occasionally, a work of fiction used its subtitle to play tricks on its reader. Robert Walser published his 1908 novel, for instance, as *Jakob von Gunten. A Diary* (although the work that follows is not exactly a fictional diary either). Yet most books of prose fiction and of poetry, I found, bore accurate if rudimentary generic designations: Heinrich Böll's *The Bread of the Early Years. Narrative* (1955); Günther Grass's *The Tin Drum. Novel* (1959); Reiner Kunze's *with the volume turned down. poems* (1972); Karin Struck's *Class Love. Novel* (1973). At the same time, German publishers and German literary culture seemed to place great weight on generic subdis-

inctions. Two pieces of prose fiction by the same author, of almost equivalent length, and brought out by the same publishing house might bear different labels, one designated *Erzählung* (narrative, tale, story), the other *Roman* (novel).

As a teenager, I found such specification not only intensely pedantic but weirdly funny, for it summoned up a deeply surreal phase in my family's domestic life. To prepare us linguistically for an impending sabbatical year in Germany, my American mother had affixed German labels to everyday objects around the house. For one summer, at least, to look into our dining room was like looking into a three-dimensional children's picture dictionary; palpably real objects all sported slips of paper bearing their proper names and thus existed at an odd remove from their usual selves.

The designation of a novel as a novel, a poetry volume as poems struck me as equally alienating, reducing books to mere commodities—a box of salt with the generic label “Salt,” a bag of flour announcing itself as “Flour”—as if the book's content (and the irreducibility of authorial style) was virtually irrelevant. Both the bookstore and the public library, to be sure, are regularly organized around generic designations and subdesignations: nonfiction, fiction, mysteries, poetry. Yet the introduction of such broad generic cues into the title itself seemed to me to violate the individuality of the text.

I am still not sure when this titling convention began or quite why it persists. My colleague Rüdiger Campe suggests that its ongoing German use might involve a self-conscious vestige or revival of the late 1920s' *Neue Sachlichkeit* (the New Objectivity or Verist) aesthetic, itself a response to both the machine aesthetics and fervent, mystical, revolutionist anticapitalism of the earlier avant-garde. In the wake of expressionist and revolutionary manifestos, the self-consciously cool presentation of texts as generic objects demystified aesthetic production through classification. I find this hypothesis provocative and plausible. After 1945, certainly, literary sensibility was inflected by the period's forced austerity and widespread stocktaking; Günter Eich's famous 1948 poem “Inventory,” for

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instance, quite literally takes stock of the humble, carefully hoarded accoutrements of POW existence: “This is my cap, this is my coat. . . . Tin can: my plate, my cup.”¹ Were postwar publishers (and readers) animated by a similar spirit, made manifest in their titling (and buying) practices? “This is my novel, this is my book of poems.”

Yet there are obviously much older precedents at work as well. For English-language publishing once—indeed long—used the same reigning convention of designating genre through subtitle. So perhaps German publishers simply retain a generic convention once more widespread in Western Europe although since abandoned elsewhere. But if to them generic subtitles still make intellectual and commercial sense, then why did comparable practices end in Britain almost two centuries ago? At first glance, Franco Moretti’s provocative essay on novel titles seems to provide the answer, more or less in passing: because in Britain titles in general got shorter. As more and more books entered an increasingly massified market and began circulating through lending libraries, Moretti argues, titles needed to be—and hence became—shorter to facilitate sorting and cataloguing; rapid circulation and rapid turnover apparently meant that long, leisurely early modern titles (often imparting a picaresque or picturesque tour of the novel’s contents) gave way to faster, snappier titles. Even as content description moved out of the title, moreover, a new breed of magazine reviews took over the work of summarizing works of fiction for potential buyers and readers.

Yet such reviews would not, in fact, have been to hand to guide potential readers at the point of sale or lending. And wouldn’t more title information—and more explicit generic labeling—actually *help* rather than impede cataloguing, *especially* given a larger bulk of titles? (Contemporary library catalogues, indeed, thrive precisely on cross-referencing; were subject headings and cross-references also features of early lending library catalogues?) By the 1830s, Moretti assures us, the generic subtitle begins vanishing from most British book titles, and by the end of the nineteenth century such designations had come to seem archaic, redolent of eighteenth-century literary norms. Moretti himself, indeed, seems impatient with them long before they vanish. To him, they are too explicit and crude to hold real interest. He omits them from his database (and hence even from his word counts) except in the *earliest* few cases of a particular generic designation or in cases where a highly specified form of generic labeling—*A Dramatic Novel*, *A Neapolitan Tale*—seems to call into question the applicability of the general category. His account concentrates

1. Günter Eicentur, *Abgelegene Gehöfte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1948), pp. 42–43; trans. mine.

instead on more subtle and indirect forms of generic categorization, the implicit signals given by the semantics of the main title.

From the 1790s through the 1820s, for instance, the courtship novel remained generically undermarked (that is, without conventionalized subtitles specifying a particular novel as *A Marriage Novel* or using rhetorical questions like *Or, Which Should She Wed?* to indicate plot arc). Instead, the use of a proper name, especially a *single* proper name, in a novel's title often came to mark either a courtship plot, if the name was a female Christian name (Frances Burney's 1782 *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*; Maria Edgeworth's 1801 *Belinda*; Jane Austen's 1815 *Emma*), or some variant of bildungsroman, if a male surname (such as William Godwin's 1799 *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* or his 1817 *Mandeville: A tale of the seventeenth century in England*). Such observations, suggestive in themselves, prepare the way for the most brilliant patch in Moretti's analysis: his speculations about the subsequent shift from "The" titles to "A" titles, as he juxtaposes one fin-de-siècle reformist genre with another, the Jacobin novel of the 1790s with the New Woman novel of the 1890s. The Jacobin novel, he argues, uses "The" to suggest large-scale, indeed systemic, social problems. A hundred years later, however, in condition-of-women novels, exemplarity involves precisely the breaking down of previously held assumptions and generalizations about who women are and what women want. And so the specificity of individual characters, individual dreams, individual plights ("A") becomes a crucial challenge to "The" existing, socially normative gender system, with its biologically rooted assumptions about women's capabilities and needs.

Even apparent exceptions to Moretti's generalizations still confirm his larger hypotheses. In George Gissing's 1893 *The Odd Women* the adjective "odd" and in F. M. Mayor's 1925 *The Rector's Daughter* the possessive "rector's" both announce a "destabilized domesticity," as the first novel's glut of marriageable women, and the second's quasi-feudal subordination of daughter to father exemplify more general shortcomings of the patriarchal order. And although on the face of it Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary. A Fiction* (1788) and her unfinished *Maria, or the Wrongs of Women* (1798) are both indictments of women's situation, *Mary* (written slightly before the heyday of the Jacobin novel) does not announce this agenda in its subtitle with nearly the force of *Maria's* subtitle, a decade later.

As the example of Wollstonecraft indicates, indeed, the semantics of the generic subtitle can be just as suggestive as the semantics of the title proper. So what does Moretti lose by programmatically omitting subtitles from his analysis? Such omission obviously weakens the accuracy of his statistical argument about length. Yet the omission also forecloses analysis of the

relational assignment of generic designations as part of a mutually constitutive genre system (a text is an *Erzählung* if not a *Roman*, *Roman* if not *Erzählung*, a novel if not a drama, or perhaps even “A Dramatic Poem”). Perhaps in compensation, the elision of the generic subtitle enables Moretti to perform tighter, more virtuosic close readings of the few title words that remain. (Cleanth Brooks needed a well-shaped ode to perform exemplary close analysis. Moretti needs only three words, dancing beautifully on the head of a pin.)

Moretti’s recent work both extols and draws heavily on the brilliant statistical work of bibliographers and book historians like Peter Garside and James Raven. Nonetheless, his tendency here is to use statistical “findings” to ground his own interpretive readings—and to hypothesize about publishing practice without sufficient recourse to book-historical evidence. Book history could potentially supply a middle ground between numbers and close reading. In the years after 1800, for instance, London publishers like Henry Colburn sped the launching or consolidation of new, discrete novelistic subgenres—most prominently, perhaps, the newly designated national tale and the newly refurbished historical novel—precisely through subtitling. Such subgenres, arguably, came to serve some publishers as crucial brands, and they deliberately reinforced such brand associations, for instance, by using the endpapers of one novel as places to advertise other novels in the same subgenre. (If you liked *this* novel, try *these*, also from our list.)

Meanwhile, such generic labels used nomenclature to demarcate subtle differences of putative provenance, fictional register, and intended audience. Most complex, perhaps, was the implicit distinction between fictional genres designated as tales and those designated as novels. The label historical novel indicated a wide temporal purview and an analytic interest in the past, mediated by the distinctly *modern* form of the novel, the often epic breadth of its story focalized through the experience of individual characters. Tales, in contrast, frequently conveyed a whiff of the folkloric, oral, or traditional (as in James Hogg’s 1820 miscellany, *Winter Evening Tales*). Sometimes this was linked to gothic antiquarianism, sometimes to the supernatural (William Godwin’s *St. Leon. A tale of the sixteenth century*), sometimes to the nationalist cultural plenitude celebrated in the national tale. In juvenile fiction, “tale” also suggested a shorter form, suitable for inexperienced readers with short attention spans; in gothic texts, the designation “tale” sometimes suggested the providentially retrieved, the primeval, or the fragmentary. Yet from the 1810s onward the same designation was also used for historical case studies (Godwin’s *Mandeville: A tale of the seventeenth century in England*; Hogg’s 1835 *Tales of the Wars of*

Montrose) and even for highly ambitious novel cycles, whose large view often included examining the same social milieu or geographical area across long spans of time (Scott's *Tales of My Landlord*; John Galt's *Tales of the West*; John and Michael Banim's *Tales of the West of Ireland*.)² The same generic designation, in other words, could mean really rather different, if distantly related, things, and describe texts written on completely different scales. Meanwhile, *all* of these possibilities became part of the wider semantic field evoked whenever this designation was used. Hence apparently simple, often-repeated terms like *novel* and *tale* warrant scrutiny wherever they appear in a title or subtitle, just as much as any other word.

One troubling aspect of Moretti's statistically driven model of literary history is that it seems to necessitate an impersonal invisible hand. Moretti postulates that it may be lesser-known and indeed less original authors who help inaugurate and consolidate generic changes. But in some ways his model avoids assigning causality; it remains hard to be sure who or what is creating discernible changes in the novel system, and there wouldn't appear to be an easy way to find out. Yet there is obviously a labor-intensive way to find answers—by tackling publishers' archives, reading individual manuscript drafts in rare book libraries, and trying to figure out, book for book, who determined each novel's title: author, publisher, or publicist. Such investigation would involve real footwork—and probably more commitment to specific novels than Moretti would want to make. His interest, after all, is in trying to identify systemic, overall, large-scale shifts; by this logic, any specific text becomes statistically almost irrelevant.

Yet publishing history could obviate the need for an invisible hand. In Germany, it appears, the playwright has typically affixed an idiosyncratic, descriptive, *performative* subtitle to his or her play, while the prose writer and poet have submitted to a blanket generic label, probably not (or not always) of their own selection. In Britain, we might hypothesize, novel titles typically took shape in a triangular force field generated by author, publisher, and reader engaged in a collaboration where the balance of power constantly shifts. The titles of some well-known nineteenth-century novels and novel series, indeed, are known to have evolved through overt

2. On tales and romantic fiction, see my *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, N.J., 1997), esp. chap. 3; "The Peripheral Rise of the Novel: Ireland, Scotland, and the Politics of Form," in *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000*, ed. Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (Dublin, 2005), pp. 164–82; and "Tales for Child Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Trumpener (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 177–90.

or tacit negotiations between author and publisher. Scott famously avoids giving a generic subtitle to *Waverley, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814) in order to play with a range of possible subtitles throughout his opening pages. In this case, at least, a brilliant marketer and commodifier generates public interest by withholding crucial information about the category to which his book belongs. Yet despite or even because of *Waverley's* success, the balance of power may have shifted with Scott's subsequent novels (still, for the moment, published anonymously, as *Waverley* was). For the idea for the so-called Waverley Novels seems to have emerged partly from his publisher's practice of labeling each of these with the title page designation "by the Author of 'Waverley.'" Margaret Oliphant, conversely, ran several long stories in *Blackwood's Magazine*, then decided (meanwhile securing agreement from her publisher, John Blackwood) to develop these further into a six-novel series, published as *Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863–76). A generation earlier, Galt thought of his *Tales* as a series, but they were not published as such.

More in-depth study might move us beyond such anecdotes towards firmer generalizations. There are other questions to be asked, too. Were there feedback mechanisms besides sales figures (reviews? fan letters? buzz?) through which publishers might discern which novels and novelistic genres had resonated with the public and hence deserved emulation? How, indeed, did specific publishers understand their own mandate—as purveyors of original work or as bulk marketers? And how did such self-understanding inflect their dealings with authors?

When eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers opened new novels, they often found frontispiece illustrations (a map in early editions of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; engraved "portraits" in many first-person novels). Such devices not only reinforced these novels' claims to documentary truth but helped establish or reinforce generic expectations in their readers. Throughout the eighteenth century, moreover, both British and French novels typically contained elaborate authorial prefaces (continuing a much older tradition found in ancient novels like Longus's second-to-third-century *Daphnis and Chloë* and in Renaissance novels like *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published anonymously in Spain in 1553). Such prefaces generally framed themselves as an authorial apology for the work's inadequacies or an "editorial" explanation of the work's putative, often semimiraculous provenance (found in a remote monastery, in a dead man's diary, or amid the scrap paper used to stuff gun barrels). In addition, the preface often tacitly laid out the intellectual, political, and moral agenda of the work to follow—and sometimes, implicitly, its generic framework as well. Can the successive shortening of novels' titles in

nineteenth-century Britain be correlated with changes (reductions) in their paratexts? For isn't the title simply the most public piece of the paratext? Or does it really (as Moretti seems to assume here) follow a separate and unrelated logic of its own?

Moretti's early monographs and his five-volume compendium *Il romanzo* treat the novel as a deeply cosmopolitan, thoroughly international genre. Yet one central axiom of Moretti's 1998 *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* was the increasing geographical and generic centering of the novel over the nineteenth century, with London and Paris becoming both the ever-more-preeminent capitals of novel publishing and the de facto centers of novelistic geography. Like Pascale Casanova's widely read, but perennially controversial *The World Republic of Letters*, Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* argues for the de facto triumph of metropolitan norms, against which all smaller literatures measure and develop themselves.³ Given these previous forays, it is unsurprising to find Moretti here using the British novel as a self-enclosed, self-evident, and self-evidently important corpus. And in examining a large, nationally based literary sample, Moretti finds new research questions and draws new conclusions.

Yet the jog needed to focus on a previously inconspicuous formal characteristic might equally be supplied by considering more than one national literature. When we are talking about the modern novel, there are obvious overlaps and mutual influences between literary and linguistic systems, as *Il romanzo* demonstrates. Moreover, the structuring oppositions of one literary system (*Roman* versus *Erzählung* in late twentieth-century German publishing) might help us to discern parallel, if not temporally synchronous, structuring oppositions in another (novel versus tale in British romanticism).

On the other hand, as the case of modern Germany suggests, some aspects of literary culture are fundamentally uneven, asynchronous across cultures, sometimes for complicated historical and institutional reasons. Moretti takes for granted that by the end of the eighteenth century the novel is centered primarily on bourgeois life; the fact that its titular heroines and heroes are commoners or gentry no longer warrants mention or analysis. Yet in Germany, during the same period, a new wave of drama and fiction is still attempting precisely to establish the possibilities of a bourgeois national public, looking to British models (Samuel Richardson's sentimental fiction, London city dramas) and to French Enlighten-

3. See *Il romanzo*, trans. Susanna Basso et al., ed. Franco Moretti, 5 vols. (Turin, 2001–3); partially reprinted as *The Novel*, trans. Michael F. Moore et al., ed. Moretti, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 2006); Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London, 1998); and Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

ment, Rousseauian, and libertine novelists. “Bourgeois tragedies” by Gottfried Lessing, Schiller, and J. M. R. Lenz thus denounce aristocratic privilege through plots centering on the martyrdom of bourgeois maidens and intellectuals. (Even plays nominally centered on aristocratic heroes—Goethe’s 1774 *Götz von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand. A Play*, Schiller’s 1781 *The Robbers. A Play*, and *Don Carlos*—actually celebrate aristocratic rebellions, refusals to conform to their own caste traditions and interests.)

Fiction written in the same literary circle often centers, analogously, on bourgeois intellectuals, whose attempts to find their way in the world involve a self-conscious eschewal of aristocratic patronage and the attempt, sometimes successful, sometimes tragic, to find alternative communities and affinities. Titles like Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship Years. A Novel* (1795) thus announce not only the bourgeois character of these heroes but the difficulty of their quest. Goethe’s 1809 *Elective Affinities. A Novel*, to be sure, draws protagonists both from the aristocracy and the intelligentsia, yet the question of a self-fashioned social order—or one based on impersonal, chemical principles—nonetheless looms large. Indeed key German romantic novels (and novellas), as we see in the case of Karl Philipp Moritz’s *Anton Reiser. A Psychological Novel* (1785–90), understand themselves as sociological or scientific case studies, more closely linked to Enlightenment intellectual inquiry than to the prospect or logic of mass markets.⁴

Moretti proposes that internal competition among booksellers partly precipitated the shortening of titles as both book and title came to be understood as recognizable commodities. This may be a plausible theory in Britain, given the increasingly vast size of its book trade—and the general influence of mercantilist thinking. In Germany, however, the absence of a single literary center and a massified book trade meant literary life remained more diffuse, less commercialized. Moreover, titles that at first glance appear consonant with contemporaneous British publishing practices—novels centered on a central protagonist and hence named for this character—prove on closer examination to be preoccupied with a different range of cultural problems, bearing culturally specific sociological meanings.

So the contents of titles, despite the appearance of similitude, might mean something subtly different in adjacent parts of Europe. But what

4. See Andreas Gailus, “*Anton Reiser*, Case History, and the Emergence of Empirical Psychology,” in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David Wellbery (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), pp. 409–14. For expert speculations on various facets of novel publishing—and naming—history, thanks to Andreas, as to Rüdiger Campe, Linda Peterson, Stefanie Markovits, Ian Duncan, and, as always, Richard Maxwell.

about length? Isn't *that* more objective? It may well be that across Western Europe novel titles gradually got shorter. But they apparently did so on very different historical timetables and thus presumably for quite distinctive (if still to be ascertained) reasons. Elsewhere in Western Europe, in fact, titles became shorter without any prompt from Britain's vast book industry. And this may mean that Moretti's assumptions about marketplace factors is too monocausal.

I come to this provisional conclusion, at least, after a somewhat frustrating afternoon googling facsimile title pages from France and Germany. This exercise left me, paradoxically, with a new appreciation for Moretti's large-scale databases. He can potentially see or find a pattern that held true for the "typical" novel, encompassing now-unknown novels as well as those now canonized. I, on the other hand, could google only what I had read, heard of, or could think of. Yet even my small, perhaps unrepresentative sample potentially complicates Moretti's picture.

France's most famous seventeenth-century novel—Madame de Lafayette's *The Princess of Cleves* (1678)—bears a terse title, a harbinger of the text's stylistic precision. This strategy represents a visible departure from Lafayette's previous fictional text, her 1662 "nouvelle" *History of the Princess of Montpensier, Under the Reign of Charles IX, King of France*, a much briefer text with a more elaborate and hence longer title. The longest novel of the period, and indeed in the French language, Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamene, or the Grand Cyrus* (1649–53) bears a relatively short title, in no proportion to its enormous length, some 13,095 pages in its original printing. (Yet early English translations, interestingly, expand this title somewhat to classify it as a work of romance, to laud the excellence of its author, and so on.)

In seventeenth-century France, then, relative brevity of title was sometimes deployed as a stylistic marker. In Germany, by contrast, Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's 1669 *Simplicissimus*, a picaresque chronicles of the Thirty Years' War, bears a full title of baroque amplitude: *The Adventurous SIMPLICISSIMUS German That is: The Description of the Life of a Strange Vagrant named Melchior Sternfels von Fuchshaim in whose and which form He came into the world what he saw, learned, experienced and suffered there and why he left it voluntarily. Thoroughly jolly and in many respects useful to read*. His now even more famous sequel of the following year is equally comprehensive: *Trutz Simplex or Extensive and wonder-miraculous Life Description of the Ur-Cheater and Vagabond Courage. . . .* (and the title goes on and on, to enumerate the female protagonist's many life phases).

In France, key eighteenth-century novel titles retain a Lafayettean terseness: Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721), Crébillon fils' *The Sofa. A Moral*

Tale (1742), Françoise de Graffigny's *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* (1747), Voltaire's *Memnon. Oriental Tale* (1747, later known as *Zadig*), and Diderot's *The Nun* (completed 1780, published posthumously 1796). When there are deviations from this brevity, indeed, it is mainly to add a whiff of documentary effect: Voltaire's *Candide or Optimism. Translated from the German by Doctor Ralph* (1759). In Germany itself, meanwhile, novel titles grow noticeably shorter over the course of the eighteenth century—perhaps the sign, Campe speculates, of a self-conscious move away from baroque aesthetics. At times, however, the titles aren't as short as all that. A long series of self-consciously Sternean novels, for instance, sport whimsical, mockingly faux-documentary titles, with room for paratextual flourishes, ludicrous or bathetic detail: for example, Theodor Hippel's *Life Lines in Ascending Order Including Appendixes A, B, C* (1778–81); Jean Paul's *Life of the Contented Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal. A Sort of Idyll* (1793), *Hesperus or 45 Dog Post Days. A Biography* (1795), and *Flowers, Fruit and Thorns or the Married Life, Death and Wedding of the Advocate of the Poor Firmian Stanislaus Siebenkäs [Sevencheese] in the Tiny Imperial Market Town Kuhschnappel* (1796–97).

French novels putatively translated from the German or indeed from Persian originals, German novelists lovingly imitating Sternean effects: even my brief search yielded ample reminders of the self-conscious cosmopolitanism of eighteenth-century literary culture. As novelistic genres traveled back and forth between England, France, and Germany, moreover, so did some trends in titling—including the long, Sternean metatitle. Yet overall titling trends nonetheless remained part of national literary systems' linguistically bound publishing worlds. The primacy of these larger conventions is demonstrated, indeed, by the fact that Germany still retains routine generic subtitles, two hundred years after such subtitles disappeared from the London-centered publishing empire. The contrast between systems is revealing in other ways, too. We tend to see French literary culture as particularly bound by rules and arbiters, given the rigid Aristotelean conventions of its neoclassical drama and the linguistic purification attempted by the French Academy. Yet of the three novelistic traditions described here, it actually seems the least obsessed with taxonomizing labels—one reason, perhaps, why it became the earliest to adopt short, purely descriptive novel titles.

Macroanalysis can certainly yield interesting observations and speculations. Yet the questions Moretti arrives at through statistics, I would argue, can be derived equally from comparing literary systems. I began this response, quite self-consciously, with an autobiographical, familiarly inflected anecdote about my own history as a reader. I thus began with a

subjective reading response—on the opposite end of the methodological spectrum, it would seem, from the statistical table. Yet this idiosyncratic entry point, I tried to show, led organically to long-term ruminations on the same book-historical problems that Moretti claims become visible only in aggregate. Crucially, I think, my distinctly informal, unsystematic bookstore ponderings were also cross-cultural, involving implicit comparison of bookselling (hence also of publishing practices) in two divergent literary systems.

Here in “Style, Inc.,” as in his 2005 *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, Moretti argues for the explanatory power of “abstract models.”⁵ I would argue rather for the continued usefulness of older comparative methods, particularly those associated with the discipline of comparative literature. Statistics of course highlight continuities and discontinuities in a given body of data. Yet the information they can yield remains constrained by their search parameters. Moretti is interested here in the history of British book titles during one stretch of British literary history and has worked to acquire a systematic knowledge of them. But his findings may not be readily generalizable for other stretches of literary history, not even in neighboring and closely interconnected literary cultures.

Moretti’s closing paragraphs frame his recent work as a kind of show-down or perhaps controlled competition between statistical analysis and close reading. Yet the strength of this essay, at least, lies particularly in its shrewd formal analysis, its attention to syntax, linguistic register, and grammar. Here, as always, Moretti is compulsively readable, a Pied Piper whose energies, enthusiasms, and irreverence pull us along in his wake. But we need to keep asking questions about the nature and general applicability of the quantitative methods he embraces here—and has been endorsing, for the last few years, as literary scholarship’s best way forward.

As the book jacket copy for *Graphs, Maps, Trees* puts it, “literature scholars should stop reading books and start counting, graphing, and mapping them instead” in the hope of bringing “new luster to a tired field.” Yet the current essay, at least, shows statistical analysis as a relatively blunt hermeneutic instrument, redeemed mainly by Moretti’s own exegetical verve. Our current disciplinary practice may be, as *Graphs*’s paratext declares, “random and unsystematic.” But the answer can’t lie simply in data processing and in what Moretti has previously dubbed “distant reading.”⁶ For as he himself demonstrates, any attempt to see the big picture needs to

5. See Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London, 2005).

6. Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2000): 56.

be informed by broad knowledge, an astute, historicized sense of how genres and literary institutions work, incisive interpretive tools. And an appreciation of the aleatory.

It will be good for all of us if some of us keep counting. New forms of bibliography and publishing history can indeed help demarcate the material and social conditions within which literature arises, circulates, and changes. Yet it is equally important that most of us forego counting to stay in the library (and the well-stocked bookstore, if we can still find one): there our work awaits us. In "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," Moretti memorably evokes the true immensity of literary production to lament the impossibility of reading everything.⁷ Yet despair over the unavailability of universal knowledge shouldn't drive us to the opposite extreme of thinking we must begin processing literature by the ton to make any headway. Instead, we should spend more time browsing. We are, first and foremost, highly trained readers, and some of what we find, in library or bookstore, will show us new ways to think. We can change our parameters and our questions simply by reading *more*: more widely, more deeply, more eclectically, more comparatively. Browsing in addition to quantification; incessant rather than distant reading: the unsystematic nature of our discipline is actually its salvation.

7. See Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," *MLQ* 61 (Mar. 2000): 207–27.